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TAGS: PREL ECIN PINR XM VE GY

SUBJECT: RIO GROUP SUMMIT SET FOR MARCH 3 IN  
GUYANA--VENEZUELA,S CHAVEZ COMING?

REF: GEORGETOWN 59

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID M. ROBINSON FOR REASON 1.4(D)

¶1. (U) Summary: The 2007 Rio Group Summit of Heads of State will be held in Georgetown, Guyana on March 3, preceded by a Foreign Ministers meeting on March 1, and a National Coordinators meeting on February 28. GoG insiders characterize the Summit as unlikely to attract a large turnout and largely devoid of substance. Venezuela's Chavez may be coming to Guyana, either for the Summit, or a separate visit. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Rio Group Summit: Official press releases have cited strengthening internal cohesiveness of the Rio Group as a priority for Guyana's chairmanship. However, Prime Minister Samuel Hinds, chair of the Ministerial Oversight Committee to prepare the Summit, characterized the event to DCM as a "talk shop" with no substantive agenda other than providing leaders an opportunity to meet. And according to Hinds, Guyana so far has confirmations from only two of the 19 Heads of State invited. More informally, Head of the Presidential Secretariat Roger Luncheon told DCM that Jagdeo's main

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objective as Rio Chair and Summit host is to raise Guyana's international profile. Luncheon noted that Guyana is not the sort of place where Latin Heads of State want to "put their feet up" and noted that the President's objective will not be realized if few leaders come to the Summit. Luncheon further characterized the agenda as devoid of substance and the draft communiqu as "just the usual platitudes."

¶3. (C) Chavez Coming???: According to a prominent Venezuelan couple in Georgetown, the Venezuelan Embassy informed them Wednesday evening that Hugo Chavez will be visiting Guyana "in two weeks." Hinds confirmed that Guyana expects a Chavez visit, but not that soon, and noted that Chavez has also invited President Jagdeo to visit Caracas. The Venezuelan Charge told DCM that Chavez had been invited for the Rio Group Summit, but had not confirmed and likely would not make a decision until the last minute. He added that having been here for Chavez's State visit to Guyana in 2004 he does not want his boss to come again.

¶4. (SBU) Logistics: Less than five weeks before the Summit, GOG is scrambling to resolve several logistical challenges. During a meeting with CARICOM Secretary-General Edwin Carrington, Jagdeo expressed his pressing concern that the CARICOM Cricket World Cup Special Visa Regime may unintentionally impede travel of national delegations to the Rio Group Summit. Under the Special Visa Regime, holders of diplomatic and official passport of several Latin American countries who do not ordinarily require visas to enter Guyana will need to apply for a common CARICOM visa through Jamaica's consulates in Miami or New York.

¶5. (C) Comment: Guyana is probably better off with a small turnout: with only 555 hotel rooms in Georgetown, just housing and transporting 19 Presidential delegations would be a difficult task.

¶6. (C) Comment continued: Luncheon's dismissive remark about this high profile project of his boss, the President, continues a trend noted in reftel. Luncheon is yet another long-time member of the once powerful PPP Executive Committee who is bitter at being marginalized as Jagdeo consolidates power around himself and a younger group of acolytes who owe loyalty to Jagdeo rather than to the party. Further on this will be reported septel. End Comment.

Robinson